

2017

## Book Review: Consecutive Notetaking and Interpreter Training

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### Recommended Citation

Russell, Debra (2017) "Book Review: Consecutive Notetaking and Interpreter Training," *International Journal of Interpreter Education*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ijie/vol9/iss2/7>

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# Book Review: Consecutive Notetaking and Interpreter Training

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Someya, Y. (Ed). (2017). *Consecutive notetaking and interpreter training*. New York, NY: Routledge. (248 pages).

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This book reports on papers presented at a 2015 one-day international symposium that focused specifically on the theory and pedagogy of consecutive notetaking. Yasumasa Someya brings together the work of four scholars, along with his own contributions, to address a topic that has direct relevance to both spoken and signed language interpreters and educators.

In the first chapter, Tassuya Komatsu shares his personal journey to becoming an interpreter, weaving that narrative into the history of interpreting and interpreting education in Japan. His account documents key developments from the early 1960s to today, and acknowledges Danica Seleskovitch's impact on Japanese training (which segues nicely into the second chapter). Komatsu provides a fascinating discussion of the role of interpreter agencies in training, pointing to the tension that can occur between academic and theoretical programs and shorter, employment-focused curricula, a tension evident in other countries across spoken language interpreter education, and to some extent, signed language interpreter education. He also draws attention to the trend of hiring in-house interpreters, which he author contends is reducing the status of the profession of interpreters. Komatsu's call for cooperation among universities and interpreter agencies is well placed and timely.

The second chapter, by Hiromi Ito, offers an overview of how students are training at ESIT (*Ecole Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs*) in Paris. Ito describes in detail the theory and practice of notetaking, drawing on the early work of Seleskovitch and the Lederer model of Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT). She also presents a review of the cognitive psychology literature relevant to interpreting and consecutive notetaking. While the review is interesting, the material on working memory does not appear to have been updated past 2003. Ito also reviews her 2006 study of students practicing notetaking while working from Japanese into French. She emphasizes one particular benefit of notetaking: that it heightens one's awareness of one's own capacity for analyzing speech, which supports speech comprehension and target-language speech preparation.

Chapter 3, "Notation Language and Notation Text: A Cognitive-Linguistic Model of Consecutive Interpreting," by Michaela Albl-Mikasa, is an English translation of Albl-Mikasa's book in German, and I am grateful to have this access to her work. She begins by presenting a thorough review of the previous ideologies that have shaped notetaking and how it has been traditionally taught in interpreter education programs, leading the reader to an understanding of the arguments for notation as an individualized language activity. She then reviews the cognitive and psycholinguistic research supporting a cognitive model of notetaking, and links that nicely to her empirical study that draws on relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). Her study draws on five consecutive interpretations of students of differing levels of proficiency, acknowledging that student performance may differ from professional interpreters. Based on a cogent description of data, she leads the reader to discussion of teaching the ellipsis strategy, relying on dense notes based on the ST micropropositions, prior to explicit teaching of condensed and restructured notes. Albl-Mikasa offers an evidence-based argument for a shift in the field and in the approach to notetaking, and she encourages further research that applies her methodology with professional interpreters. I would recommend the purchase of this book based on this chapter alone.

In Chapter 4, Cheng-shu Yang reports an exploration into notetaking symbols in consecutive notetaking, with a focus on the relationship between the symbols and information and the interpreter's inner logic. She describes examples from a larger corpora, covering Chinese-Japanese, English-Chinese and English-Japanese. The literature review of notetaking approaches and the symbols used is well organized and clearly reported. Educators and practitioners may find the information useful when introducing notetaking to interpreting students, especially the three-stage dialogue structure (definition of scope of the talk, along with the blend of focus and presentation main points). Yang concludes that comparisons between the organized structure of notetaking symbols and recorded content demonstrates a clear correspondence between them, not only in terms of cognition of the semantic meaning, but also in terms of form. Observing the recorded process of the transmission of information between the consecutive notes and the source and target languages reveals that the interpreters in this study analyzed the source language, performing a compression of information and encoding on the information processing platform for "intermediary representation" composed of notes, and after decompression and decoding, produced the target language. The results presented in this chapter invite further study targeting more languages on a larger scale in order to see if the findings are supported across other languages.

The final two chapters of this volume are contributions from Yasumasa Someya. The first provides a theoretical model of consecutive notes and note-taking from a linguistic-cognitive lens. Someya contends that an interpreters' notes are a reflection of his/her understanding of the text, and that they can indicate the mental representation that an interpreter holds for a given text and how this is stored in memory. The chapter begins with

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an examination of that is meant by “understanding” and what is stored in memory at the sentential level, and then the discourse level. The author then introduces his dynamic propositional network (DPN) model, describing a thematic P-A schema approach to the analysis of meaning. The discussion of the language choice is a very interesting section of this chapter, and Someya builds on the early work of Alexieva (1993), who stated that linguistic decisions are based on the principle of maximum efficiency and maximum information load—offering an evaluation criteria for consecutive notes that includes propositional representation, textual representation, modality, notational/orthographic efficiency and information retrieval potential. I found this to be a very helpful chapter for educators and practitioners as it offers a thorough review of what is known about notetaking, and the theoretical base offers a way for students to practice text analysis and have a structure for their notes. The author has shared worksheets as a practice tool, a valuable resource educators and practitioners. As I finished the chapter, I wished that the theoretical frame had been better supported by research, and then I turned to Chapter Six, where I found Someya offering the results of a small-scale study on notetaking and consecutive interpreting.

The final chapter was challenging to read. The study described involved four professional interpreters, but data for only three of the interpreters are presented due to space constraints and to a suggestion that the subject’s data doesn’t contribute much to the study. Data are not reported for an additional ten students who participated in the study. While the author reports this as an experimental design there is no control group, making this likely much more of a case study approach to a 3-minute simulation experience. Based on three performances, Someya contends that the data show interpreters are motivated to extract the proposition embedded in the target utterance. Someya reports that a sight translation, as well as an eye-tracker component, were also included in the “experiment,” however there is no information about how data from those aspects were analyzed nor any reporting of the findings. There are some confusing aspects to the chapter that could be addressed with greater detail on all of the research questions, and using time codes to compare data sets. The appendices include only some of the participant data, where it may have been easier to understand the findings with a summary of the data of all of the participants, and Someya does not critique the limitations of the study, of which there appear to be many, making this chapter a disappointing conclusion to the volume.

The content of the book is interesting, however there are a number of editing errors and writing challenges that affect the readability of some of the chapters. As an educator, I found value in most of the chapters, especially the work of Michaela Albl-Mikasa. With thematic papers on notetaking collected in one volume, an educator or practitioner can use this one resource to locate useful material for constructing learning activities.